

# State of the City 2018

Although political turbulence defined 2017 in Washington, the only turbulence in Veneta was related to the weather. In fact, it was a year of accord, not discord, in our fair city. Looking back at the previous year's accomplishments and challenges, I was

struck by the degree to which we all pull together and the importance of partnerships to Veneta's progress. Creating a better city requires teamwork and collaboration among our citizens, city staff, members of the council and its boards and commissions, our civic

organizations, our business community and the other governmental entities and agencies who serve our community. All of these partners have helped to shape the City of Veneta, not just in 2017, but since its inception.



**Mayor Sandra  
Larson**

## Economic Growth

The Veneta City Council realigned its goals last year, giving economic development top priority, and prompting a lot of activity on the part of Veneta and its partners.

Economic growth is critical to retaining and creating local jobs as well as providing more goods and services for residents. Economic growth expands and enlarges the City's tax base to support vital City services and enhance Veneta's quality of life. To that end, the City and the Veneta Economic Development Committee—composed of volunteers from the citizenry and the business community—pursued a third year of Economic Development Strategic Plan implementation activities, including:

- Partnering with the Veneta-Fern Ridge Chamber of Commerce to organize the first and very successful Spring Business Showcase at Deep Woods Events Center

that brought together over 40 local businesses who networked among themselves and promoted their goods and services to the public. A second showcase is scheduled for April.

- Partnering with the Chamber to open the Small Business Assistance Center (SBAC) in the Chamber office at the West Lane Center. The SBAC provides a "mini-incubator" space for meetings, presentations and teleconferences, with computers and copiers, as well as consultation and classes with regional business assistance providers. Additional partners providing financial assistance included Banner Bank. Veneta is one of the few cities in Oregon to offer this resource. We partner with the Chamber on many

fronts, including financial support for the Visitor Center at the West Lane Shopping Center.

- Pursuing a Middle Mile fiber optics connection from Eugene to Veneta and ongoing discussion with several broadband providers to supply 21st century communication services to Veneta. Funding partners include Lane County, Business Oregon, and Lane Electric Cooperative, providing both funding and infrastructure.

Veneta has a long partnership history with the University of Oregon's Resource Assistance for Rural Environments or RARE program, through which graduate students provide 11 months of community service to communities who can provide the required financial match. In 2017, the Economic Development Committee was staffed

State of the City of Veneta 2018  
[Page 1](#)

- Economic Growth

[Page 2](#)

- Economic Growth Cont..
- Changes to City Council Last Year

[Page 3](#)

- Health and Safety

[Page 4](#)

- Parks and Recreation Projects
- City Streets & Infrastructure

by two different RARE interns, one of whom was subsequently hired to fill a half-time Urban Renewal Specialist position with the City tasked with advancing economic development objectives.

The Business Retention and Expansion program initiated in partnership with Rural Development Initiatives three years ago continues its efforts to create a better business climate in Veneta for established businesses as well as budding entrepreneurs.

*(Continued on page 2)*

# Economic Growth Continued

(Continued from page 1)

Thanks in part to an improving economy and ramped-up efforts on behalf of Veneta's largest landholders, we are seeing a lot of interest in new retail development. It's too soon to name names, but stay tuned!

Spurred by an increase in interest from potential developers at the Northeast Employment Center (NEEC) as well as feedback that some of the City's code requirements in the business park's Specific Development Plan (SDP) may be impeding development, the City funded an analysis by the University of Oregon's Community Service Center. Based on the Planning Commission's review of that report, the Commission and the Council will soon consider significant changes to the NEEC code.

Two new commercial projects are in the works, however. The big project along Highway 126 is an expansion of Veneta businessman Herb Vloedman's Fern Ridge Self Storage. On Jeans Road, M&J Agronomics is constructing a pod complex for indoor marijuana cultivation. The firm is also utilizing Veneta's

retired water treatment plant. Veneta Veterinary Hospital completed its new facility on Jeans Road across from Bi-Mart in 2017.

Population growth and residential development are an integral part of the economic development equation, of course. According to Portland State University Population Research estimates, Veneta grew to 4,785 residents last year. We are growing at a slower pace than before the recession, but among Lane County's 12 cities, our five-year growth rate of 3.8 percent was exceeded only by Junction City (11.6) Creswell (8.4) and Eugene (6).

Veneta doesn't have enough available housing to accommodate its growth potential, however. Several small infill subdivisions of three to five lots are in the works, but Hayden Homes has abruptly abandoned its approved plans for further development at Applegate Landing. Sarto Village has scaled back plans for

a proposed continuing care retirement complex on 50 acres on East Hunter Road, now proposed to be built in several phases. Home prices continue to rise, and rental properties are both scarce and expensive.

The City has genuine interest in participating with

business owners, home owners, entrepreneurs and developers in addressing the impact of specific code re-

quirements on both commercial and residential development. Some of the big issues soon to be addressed include storm water standards, tree mitigation and the cost of constructing accessory dwelling units within the City.

Everybody acknowledges that Highway 126—specifically the Fern Ridge Corridor between Eugene and Veneta—is a major deterrent to Veneta's economic development. It's narrow, poorly marked, dangerous and often congested. Unfortunately, the build-out of ODOT's Fern Ridge Corridor

Plan will be hugely expensive and is years away at best, but we are making incremental progress. Last year, the State Transportation Improvement Plan provided funding for environmental planning and preliminary design for the Fern Ridge Southern Route Multi Use Path from Greenhill to Eugene. Veneta and Lane County will each provide matching funds of \$17,500.

The Economic Development Committee recognized that Highway 126 is not only unsafe, it is unsightly—at least on the eastern approach to Veneta—which also deters development. So, we have adopted the Highway 126 Beautification Plan, a five-year plan and guidance document that addresses those problems. Implementation is also a long-term enterprise that will require collaboration and cooperation with Lane County and businesses both inside and outside the city limits, but it is a start.

*"Veneta doesn't have enough available housing to accommodate its growth potential"*



## Changes to City Council Last Year

Councilors Robbie McCoy and Keith Weiss were appointed in January to two and four-year terms on the Council, respectively. Seven residents applied to fill these vacancies resulting from 2016 resignations.

In the fall, the Council regretfully accepted the resignation of Councilor Thomas Laing, who stepped down for health reasons. Councilor Calvin Kenney was chosen from a field of two to complete Laing's four-year term, creating a vacancy on the Planning Commission.

The increasing frequency and ferocity of ice and wind storms, last summer's forest fires and the inevitability of a major earthquake on the Oregon coast make it clear that the City and its public safety partners must be prepared to deal with the aftermath of such events. And we are. In January, we adopted the City of Veneta/Lane Fire Authority Emergency Operations Plan, the product of two years' collaborative work.

Residents must take personal responsibility for preparedness, as well. In many disaster scenarios, neighborhoods will be cut off from any assistance for days, if not weeks. For guidance, type "Disaster preparedness" in the City website search bar.

First-time teenage offenders cited into Veneta's Municipal Court for traffic violations may now be offered the option of paying a \$25 diversion fee to the City and completing the [uturn180.com](http://uturn180.com) online traffic safety course for a separate fee of \$45, after which the court will dismiss the citation.

In Judge Leiman's words, this is "an opportunity to turn what would have been a one minute interaction with the youthful traffic offender...in which the judge implores the youth to make better decisions behind the wheel into that, plus three solid hours on the dangers of distracted driving."

The City continues to provide financial support to our active and effective Neighborhood Watch, and to meet with the proponents of a re-

configured Fern Ridge Law Enforcement District. We continue to explore participation in a special policing district because of its potential to curtail the spiraling cost of our public safety contract and to provide more police coverage. The group intends to put the modified proposal before the voters in November and the City has agreed to fund the Special Districts Economic Feasibility Statement, an impartial analysis to be conducted by Lane Council of Governments.

Veneta continues to contract with the Lane County Sheriff's Office to provide public safety services within City limits. Last year, that contract increased \$3,354 to \$866,833 for four deputies,

50% of a supervisory sergeant's time, plus dispatch and records time.

We were sorry to lose Sgt. Scott Denham to a full-time sergeant's post in Creswell, but happy to welcome his replacement Sgt. Steve Sieczkowski. We also said farewell to retiring Deputy Mark Nelson who served the City for more than 18 years.

One of our newer deputies, Richard Smith has been getting positive reviews (as well as waves and smiles) for introducing bike patrol to Veneta's community policing efforts. He regularly rides at Territorial Skate Park engaging and building rapport with young people there.

The safety of our children is mutually important to the

City and the Fern Ridge School District, and we are working with the district to reduce the speed limit on Territorial and to extend Veneta Elementary School's traffic zone. To date, ODOT has determined that a speed reduction is not warranted and we haven't decided whether or not to appeal that decision. The school zone extension is a separate request.

Acquiring funding for a 150-watt generator to meet emergency preparedness needs at the recently enlarged Veneta Elementary School is a priority for both the City and Lane Fire Authority. The school will become an emergency shelter in the event of an emergency.

Cities across the nation are wrestling with the seemingly intractable problem of homelessness, and Veneta is no exception. Despite limited resources, we attempt to help our partners meet the needs of our unhoused residents, including providing funding for the warming shelter and the weekly community dinner at the United Methodist Church. City representatives meet regularly with the Veneta Homeless Advocacy Board (VHAB) and last year accommodated their request for scheduled access to shower facilities at the Veneta Community Pool.

We have seen a recent increase in abandoned illegal campsites which have both health and financial impacts

on the City. VHAB volunteers assisted the City with clean-up at several sites last year, but prevention and clean-up are responsibilities that really belong with the property owner. This year, we will develop a policy defining that responsibility as well as an aggressive program of enforcement.

Not so fun fact: An unsprayed female cat, her mate, and their offspring producing an average of 2.8 surviving kittens per litter at a rate of two litters a year, adds up to 11,606,077 cats in nine years! Over the past four years, with the support of a grant from PetSmart Charities and a group of dedicated volunteers calling themselves Friends of Ferals, Veneta has spayed or neutered 332 feral or stray cats. In one now abandoned feral cat colony on Houston Road, last year, 28 cats and 11 kittens were trapped, spayed or neutered, and adopted. The Council recently approved funding to extend the program through the end of the fiscal year, sufficient to spay or neuter 100 additional cats.

Although we received limited complaints last year, flocks of feral turkeys continue to roam the City and the consensus is that, in spite of continuing eradication efforts by designated public works employees, the turkey population is increasing. Residents are encouraged to NOT feed the turkeys and to restrict availability of cat and dog food. Availability of food seems to be the biggest contributor to the problem.

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***"The safety of our children is mutually important to the City and the Fern Ridge School District."***

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## Parks & Recreation Projects

Fundraising for the multi-purpose pool—aka the “kiddie pool”—continued apace. Thanks to a dedicated group of supporters, we raised \$285,000 in grants and donations, but our best laid plans were sent awry mostly by an improving economy. Bids for construction, even with a redesign to lower costs, came in \$200,000 over our \$350,000 budget. The good news is that we haven’t given up. The State Parks and Recreation Department encouraged us to apply this year for a grant larger than the \$175,000 they had awarded us, and we have asked our donors and other grantors to let us “bank” their funds pending the result of that application.

The Council adopted the City Park Master Plan calling for improvements to parking, playgrounds, structures,

landscaping, lighting, and restroom facilities there. Implementation began with the removal of hazard trees, wetland delineation and preliminary park design.

The City and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 9448 agreed to site the VFW’s long-planned veterans’ memorial at City Park near the pool east of the paved parking lot. Fundraising has begun and the group hopes to begin construction this year. The VFW is our valued partner in City beautification, bringing the uplifting array of United States flags to the West Lane Center and four corners intersection on national holidays.

Veneta was blessed with good weather and good partners for all of its signature events last year—the annual Easter Egg Hunt, the Earth Day celebration, the fall Tree

Celebration, the Christmas Tree Lighting, and the Holiday Light Parade. Thanks to the Veneta Park Board, the Chamber of Commerce, Lane Fire Authority and its CERT Team, Fern Ridge School District, Kiwanis, Lane Electric, EPUD, and many, many community volunteers, these events all seem to get better every year, if that’s possible. A special shout-out to Santa Claus and to the Veneta Elementary and Elmira High School choirs, and many thanks to Barry MacGuire for providing his sound equipment and expertise!

The City was pleased to support Lane Arts Council’s All About Art summer camp hosted by Veneta Elementary, providing hands-on arts experience to 45 Fern Ridge youth. The Council has provided a summer art camp in Veneta each year since the mid-90’s.

The Veneta Harvest Festival, Mid Lane Cares’ major fundraiser that supports the operation of the Fern Ridge Service Center, was bigger than ever, and Kiwanis of Fern Ridge made the holidays brighter for many in our community with the annual Thanksgiving dinner and holiday food drive. Veneta’s public works crew provides assistance to all of these events, as well as to the S.A.N.T.A. Project.

Food for Lane County, another of our valued partners, again provided free lunches to children ages 2 to 18 at City Park last summer. The Love Project relies on Food for Lane County to provide much of the food dispensed at their much-used food pantry located in the Fern Ridge Service Center.

## City Streets and Infrastructure

The third year of our Pavement Preservation Plan saw improvements to McCutcheon Avenue from Territorial Road to 8th Street and Dunham Avenue from Territorial to Second Street, including removal and replacement of several ADA pedestrian ramps to meet state standards, as well as the reconstruction of Tidball Lane from Huston Road to the City limits. In line with our Wastewater Master Plan, we

began the design and engineering process to replace the Jeans Road lift station, a major project intended to serve the east side of the city as build-out and demand increase.

The City also completed construction of a new water main on Third Street from Broadway to Hunter.

We still haven’t determined who or what was the source of the contamination that severely crippled our

wastewater plant, but we have zeroed in on the sewer sub-zone location where it originated and, fortuitously, the problem has finally abated.

Mid Lane Cares received a \$40,000 award from EPUD’s Go GREEN grant program to install solar panels on the city-owned Fern Ridge Service Center. Mid Lane, the City and a group of dedicated volunteers worked to “get out the

vote” for Mid Lane’s fourth application.

Because EWEB reduced Veneta’s wholesale water rates in 2017 (How often does that happen?!), we chose to forego our scheduled consumer water rate increase. We resumed our schedule of two percent annual water rate increases for 2018, however, and initiated a small increase in the stormwater drainage fee.

***“Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success,”  
Henry Ford once observed.***

The City of Veneta came together at incorporation in 1962. We have stayed together throughout a remarkable 56-year history of civil cohesiveness, and in 2018, the City and its vital partners will continue to work together for the common good, creating a city that is successful in advancing its progressive agenda to provide healthful growth and prosperity for its resident partners.